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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN - PRESIDENT NAZARBAYEV REFUTES RUMORS OF
IMPENDING RESIGNATION

¶1. (SBU) Rumors have been swirling around Astana in recent weeks that President Nazarbayev will announce his resignation on July 6 -- Nazarbayev's 68th birthday and the day the country will officially celebrate Astana's 10th anniversary as Kazakhstan's capital. (Note: Several heads of state, including Russian President Medvedev and Turkish President Gul are expected to be in attendance for the 10th anniversary celebration. End Note.) Rumor-mongers claim Nazarbayev would name Astana mayor Imangali Tasmagambetov as his successor.

¶2. (SBU) Nazarbayev appears to have deliberately refuted the resignation rumors in June 6 remarks to the press in Atyrau, following a meeting there with Kazakhstan's Foreign Investors' Council. Nazarbayev told journalists that he "does not intend to depart," but rather that he will stay "as long as the people have confidence in him" and support him at the ballot box. He pointedly added that any talk of a successor is "idle speculation." Nazarbayev also expressed opposition to renaming Astana "Nursultan" in his honor -- a proposal recently put forth by Majilis member Sat Tokpakbayev (who is also a former defense minister).

¶3. (SBU) Comment: The origins of the resignation rumors remain unclear. In any event, we give them no credence. Given Kazakhstan's 2010 OSCE chairmanship -- which will provide the country with its most significant international leadership role to date -- and Nazarbayev's many ambitious plans for Kazakhstan's further development, at present there is no reason to believe Nazarbayev would consider resigning prior to the completion of his current term in office in January 2013. End Comment.

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